

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

This MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING ("MOU"), dated as of December 1, 2010, serves as a facilitating document toward establishing cooperation

BETWEEN

WEST HARTFORD HOUSING AUTHORITY ("WHHA")
80 Shield Street
West Hartford, CT 06110

AND CONNECTICUT'S

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES ("DCF")
505 Hudson Street
Hartford, CT 06106.

1. Background

- 1.1 WHHA and DCF have a joint interest in helping very low-income families for whom the lack of adequate housing is a primary factor in the separation, or threatened imminent separation, of children from their families or in the prevention of reunifying the children with their families.
- 1.2 WHHA and DCF also have a joint interest in helping youths age 18 through 21 for whom the lack of adequate housing is a primary factor inhibiting a youth's transition to independence.
- 1.3 WHHA's mission, as set forth in the Connecticut statutes and the resolution establishing it as public housing authority ("PHA") on April 13, 1942, is to provide safe and sanitary dwelling accommodations available to families of low income at rentals they can afford, and WHHA has been fulfilling that mission since then.
- 1.4 The Connecticut legislature established DCF in 1969. DCF's given mission is to protect children, improve child and family well-being, and to support and preserve families, statewide. DCF accomplishes this by respecting and working within individual cultures and communities in Connecticut, and by cooperating with other assistance organizations.
- 1.5 WHHA is applying to HUD to participate in HUD's FUP. In order to meet the criteria for its FUP application, WHHA seeks to collaborate with DCF to fulfill FUP requirements and improve services to those families targeted under HUD's FUP.

2. Past Experience

- 2.1 WHHA has progressively expanded its capacity to provide housing and housing assistance for all moderate to low income families and individuals. WHHA has embraced family unification as a core strategy in helping strengthen its community. WHHA's programs include:
- (a) Housing Choice Vouchers ("HCV") administration – since 1974, WHHA is the primary administrator of a program that has grown to roughly 475 HCVs. For nearly two decades, WHHA has consistently maintained an administrator rating of "High Performer";
 - (b) Family Self Sufficiency ("FSS") program – established in 2008 to help voucher families obtain employment that will lead to economic independence and self-sufficiency. WHHA works with welfare agencies such as DCF, schools, businesses, and other local partners to develop individual strategies to give participating FSS family members the skills and experience to enable them to obtain employment that pays a living wage.
 - (c) Family Unification Program ("FUP") administration – for more than ten years, WHHA has provided services to Connecticut's Department of Social Services ("DSS") as a subcontractor, administering approximately 1,500 HCVs, including FUP vouchers; and
 - (d) WHHA is owner, administrator, and manager for 135 units of elderly and disabled housing in two facilities, and is working with HUD and the state's housing finance authority to expand its capacity.
- 2.2 DCF has extensive experience in developing and administering programs designed to mitigate familial collapse and to assist foster youths age 18 to 21 ("FUP-eligible youths") achieve independence. DCF's many programs for maintaining family unity include:
- (a) Community Housing Assistance Program ("CHAP") is semi-supervised, subsidized housing for youths. The program increases competence, self-reliance and self-sufficiency as youth transition into out-of-home placement;
 - (b) Connecticut Youth Opportunities Strategy ("CYOS") is designed to insure that youth aging-out of foster care have opportunities in the following areas: youth leadership, youth engagement, employment, housing, and physical and mental health; and

- (c) A decade-long participation in FUP partnerships with Connecticut PHAs. These joint DCF-PHA programs are integral to the execution of DCF's mission.

2.3 WHHA and DCF currently cooperate:

- (a) to provide WHHA's FSS program – WHHA and DCF continue to work to expand WHHA's comprehensive program to provide FSS family members the skills and experience to enable them to obtain employment; and
- (b) with DCF to provide administrative support for DSS's FUP HCVs.

Accordingly, the parties agree as follows:

3. Partnership Goals

- 3.1 For families whose children for whom the lack of adequate housing is a primary factor in the imminent placement of the family's child in out-of-home care or delay in the discharge of the child to the family from out-of-home care, WHHA and DCF will work together to:
 - (a) Ensure that adequate housing is not the primary barrier causing the separation or continued separation between a family and its children;
 - (b) Develop and apply methods to identify and assist families without adequate housing; and
 - (c) Empower them to resolve their own problems, enabling them to effectively utilize assistive services, and advocate for themselves and their children with schools, public and private agencies, and other community institutions.
- 3.2 For FUP-eligible youths, the WHHA and DCF will work together to:
 - (a) Ensure that they have adequate and stable housing opportunities to support their successful transition to adulthood; and
 - (b) Empower them to resolve their own problems, to effectively utilize assistive services, and to advocate for themselves with public and private agencies, and other community institutions.

4. Partnership Standards for Success

- 4.1 For families with FUP vouchers:
 - (a) After six months, at least 90% remain together in their subsidized unit;

- (b) After one year, at least 75% remain together in their subsidized unit; and
- (c) After two years, at least 65% remain together, whether or not they continue living in subsidized housing.

4.2 For FUP-eligible youths with FUP vouchers:

- (a) After six months, at least 90% of will remain in the subsidized housing; and
- (b) After the 18-month term of their FUP voucher, at least 80% will successfully transition to safe, affordable, permanent housing.
- (c) WHHA will provide FUP-eligible youth with the opportunity to participate in the Family Self-Sufficiency Program.

5. WHHA and DCF Staff Positions for FUP Liaison

- 5.1 Identify staff positions at both the WHHA and the DCF who will serve as the lead FUP liaisons. These positions will be responsible for the transmission and acceptance of FUP referrals.

Name and title of WHHA staff position:

Anna Muhammad, Family Self-Sufficiency Coordinator

Name and title of DCF staff position:

Kimberly Somaroo-Rodriguez, Program Supervisor

6. WHHA Responsibilities

- 6.1 WHHA shall amend its administrative plan in accordance with applicable program regulations and requirements to facilitate the requirements imposed by FUP. These amendments include:
- (a) A means of accepting lists of families and youths certified by DCF as eligible for FUP from DCF for processing in a timely manner. Specifically, for each FUP certified by DCF, WHHA, at a minimum, will compare the names with those of applicants already on WHHA's HCV waiting list. If FUP applicant is on WHHA's HCV waiting list, WHHA will assist that applicant in accordance with WHHA's HCV admission policies. Otherwise, FUP applicants will be placed on WHHA's HCV waiting list, regardless of WHHA's HCV waiting list's closure, and processed according to plan;

- (b) A means of determining if families with children referred by DCF are eligible for HCV assistance and placing eligible families on WHHA's HCV waiting list;
 - (c) A means of determining if youths age 18 through 21 referred by DCF are eligible for HCV assistance, and placing eligible youths on WHHA's HCV waiting list; and
 - (d) A means of determining, as is reasonably feasible, if any families with children and FUP-eligible youths that are on WHHA's HCV waiting list, are living in temporary shelters or on the street (i.e., are homeless), and referring such applicants to DCF.
- 6.2 WHHA will execute its administrative plan for the HCV program in accordance with program regulations and requirements. This performance will include:
- (a) Placing families on WHHA's HCV waiting list; and
 - (b) Assisting applicants in the order of their position on the waiting list in accordance with WHHA admission policies.
 - (c) Determining if applicants are eligible for HCV assistance.
 - (d) Providing Mobility Assistance through the use of mobility counseling and housing search assistance program to help FUP eligible families and youth, obtain rental units outside the areas of concentration of poverty and increase utilization of FUP voucher.
 - (e) Removing jurisdictional barriers to mobility by contacting landlords and landlord associations directly, meeting with referral companies or agencies and counseling with families concerning finding appropriate housing options.
 - (f) Owner participation in low-poverty census tracts through landlord association meetings, providing listings to available rentals to WHHA and working with local realtors to establish online listing for families.
- 6.3 WHHA shall maintain data relevant to evaluating the performance of FUP in accordance with program regulations and requirements.
- 6.4 WHHA shall cooperate with the HUD office or a HUD-approved contractor in evaluating its FUP.
- 6.5 Comply with the provisions of this MOU

- 6.6 Upon notification that vouchers have been awarded, train DCF staff on the WHHA's HCV procedures; and
- 6.7 Conduct regular meetings (at least quarterly) with the DCF

7. DCF Responsibilities

- 7.1 DCF shall update its systems used to identify FUP-eligible families and FUP-eligible youths within the agency's caseload, and to review referrals from WHHA.
- 7.2 DCF shall provide WHHA with written certification that a family qualifies as a FUP-eligible family, or that a youth qualifies as a FUP-eligible youth, based upon the criteria established in section 8(x) of the United States Housing Act of 1937, and the Federal Register Docket No. FR-5415-N-15 (the Notice of Funding Availability for FUP).
- 7.3 The DCF shall maintain appropriate resources to continue to assure that eligible families and FUP-eligible youths are identified and qualified as eligible in a timely manner. This commitment must include a process to ensure that the DCF's active caseload is reviewed at least once a month (when the WHHA has FUP vouchers available), to identify FUP-eligible families and FUP-eligible youths, and refer them to the WHHA. Additionally, the DCF must be prepared to provide referrals to the WHHA within 30 working days of receiving notification from the WHHA about voucher availability.
- 7.4 The DCF shall provide cash assistance to income FUP eligible families and FUP-eligible youths, as appropriate, in locating housing units and working with property owners to secure appropriate eligible units. This includes mobility and cash assistance when needed.
- 7.5 DCF shall maintain sufficient resources to continue to provide appropriate follow-up supportive services to FUP families and FUP-eligible youths leasing FUP units, including housing search assistance in low poverty census tracts and mobility assistance-pre-move and post-move counseling.
- 7.6 The DCF shall provide to families and FUP-eligible youths leasing FUP HCV-subsidized units intensive case management designed to assist families and youths to develop and use, as appropriate, a network of services for solving issues related to, and including: personal economics, social welfare, health, relapse prevention, child abuse, and substance abuse.

- 7.7 The DCF shall provide cash assistance to families and FUP-eligible youths leasing FUP HCV-subsidized units for but not limited to security deposits, utility or arrears, furniture or households necessary to maintain stable housing.
- 7.8 The DCF shall engage one full-time (40-hours) case manager for every approximately twelve families or FUP-eligible youths for a period up to 2 years. In addition, the DCF shall provide each family or FUP-eligible youth access to other specialists, including a Housing Specialist, an Employment Specialist, and a Clinical Director.
- 7.9 The DCF shall engage FUP-eligible youths no longer in the DCF caseload through the DCF Re-entry program.
- 7.10 The DCF provide access to community-based family support services after their child protection case is closed
- 7.11 The DCF shall maintain data relevant to evaluating the performance of the FUP in accordance with applicable program regulations and requirements.
- 7.12 The DCF shall cooperate with the HUD office or a HUD-approved contractor in evaluating the FUP program by providing relevant FUP data to the HUD office or contractor.
- 7.13 When the WHHA issues FUP HCVs to youths, the WHHA and DCF shall form an agreement whereby DCF agrees to provide a WHHA FUP HCV-assisted youth, at a minimum, the following services for a period of not less than eighteen months:
 - (a) Basic life skills information/counseling on money management, use of credit, housekeeping, proper nutrition/meal preparation; and access to health care (e.g., doctors, medication, and mental and behavioral health services).
 - (b) Counseling on compliance with rental lease requirements and with HCV program participant requirements, including assistance/referrals for assistance on security deposits, utility hook-up fees, and utility deposits.
 - (c) Providing such assurances to owners of rental property as are reasonable and necessary to assist a FUP-eligible youth to rent a unit with a FUP voucher.
 - (d) Job preparation and attainment counseling (where to look/how to apply, dress, grooming, relationships with supervisory personnel, etc.).
 - (e) Educational and career advancement counseling regarding attainment of general equivalency diploma (GED); attendance/financing of education at

technical school, trade school or college; including successful work ethic and attitude models.

- (f) Participation of FUP-eligible youths in the assessment and implementation of actions to address their needs, including the development of an individual case plan on each youth for services to be received and the youth's commitment to the plan (youth required to sign a service plan agreeing to attend counseling/training sessions and to take other actions as deemed appropriate to the youth's successful transition from foster care.

- 7.14 Comply with the provisions of this MOU
- 7.15 Upon notification that vouchers have been awarded, train PHA staff on the DCF's referral procedures; and
- 7.16 Conduct regular meetings (at least quarterly) with the WHHA.

8. Resources and Services


- 8.1 DCF shall commit a sufficient number of staff to identify, qualify, and certify FUP-eligible families and former foster youths in a timely manner.
- 8.2 DCF shall engage at least one fulltime case manager for each approximately twelve families or FUP-eligible youths. In addition, DCF shall provide each family or FUP-eligible youth access to other specialists, including a Housing Specialist, an Employment Specialist, and a Clinical Director.
- 8.3 DCF shall maintain sufficient resources to continue to provide appropriate follow-up supportive services to families and youths leasing FUP units.
- 8.4 WHHA shall maintain sufficient staff resources to assure the high quality of its administration of FUP HCVs is in accordance with program policy, regulations, and requirements.

9. Miscellaneous

- 9.1 The performance by both parties of the commitment of time, resources and responsibilities set forth and agreed to in this MOU are contingent upon an award of FUP HCVs to WHHA and their continued funding.
- 9.2 Terms not specified in this MOU are found in HUD HCV regulations [24 C.F.R. 982, et seq.].


To evidence the parties' agreement to the MOU, they have executed and delivered it on the date set forth in the preamble.

On behalf of DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES:



Susan I. Hamilton
Commissioner

On behalf of WEST HARTFORD HOUSING AUTHORITY:



George Howell
Executive Director



DEPARTMENT of CHILDREN and FAMILIES
Making a Difference for Children, Families and Communities



Susan I. Hamilton, M.S.W., J.D.
Commissioner

M. Jodi Rell
Governor

November 22, 2010

State of Connecticut
Department of Children and Families
505 Hudson Street
Hartford, CT 06106

Public Child Welfare Agency Statement of Need for Family Unification Program

The town of West Hartford Housing Authority is seeking to partner with the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to apply for federal funding of 25 units to serve FUP eligible families and youth in West Hartford. DCF is the state child welfare agency in Connecticut. Child Welfare services are provided statewide to children and families through 14 local area offices. Annually DCF receives approximately 30,000 reports of abuse and neglect. The majority of referrals are physical neglect, including a considerable number of reports of "inadequate shelter" of child(ren). Housing is a major issue for child welfare, having a major impact on the preservation and reunification of families.

Connecticut recognizes that family homelessness is a growing problem and has continued to monitor this trend across the state. Every year HUD requires all applicants for federal homeless assistance grants to conduct a "point in time" count of people who are homeless in their communities the last week in January. This count helps to evaluate the causes of homelessness, effectiveness of state and local programs and to monitor progress on eliminating homelessness. According to the last available Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness¹ annual Point in Time Count Report it was reported that on January 28, 2009 there were 430 families and 801 children in families found to be homeless in Connecticut. There were also 18 accompanied youth found homeless that night.

Many Connecticut communities such as, Hartford, Waterbury, New Britain, New Haven, and Middlesex County, have established and implemented their own "10 Year Plan to End Homelessness". These communities also participate in the annual point in time count and have developed a "Continuum of Care", (a group

¹ Connecticut Coalition 2009 Annual Point in Time Final Report, 2010 report is unavailable at this time.

of local community providers working together to eliminate homelessness). These groups have consistently found that the top causes of homelessness are the lack of well-paid employment and affordable housing. In Connecticut, the average cost of a modest two-bedroom apartment is \$1,062 a month. A parent would need to earn at least \$20.42 an hour to be able to afford this apartment.² The state minimum wage is \$8.25. This is a huge gap considering that if an individual worked two minimum wage jobs, they still would not be able to afford housing for their family. Maintaining housing is a huge struggle, as rent rates continue to increase and wages do not. In Hartford county alone 2/3 of the population live below the poverty line. Areas such as these have the largest concentration of child welfare cases. Poverty, substance abuse, domestic violence, are all exacerbated by the lack of affordable housing. Ultimately children are removed and families are separated.

In an effort to alleviate this dilemma, DCF established the Supportive Housing for Families Program (SHF). Over eleven years ago DCF partnered with the Department of Social Services (DSS) to create this program which provides intensive case management and housing together. The program assists families to develop and utilize a network of services in the following areas: economic (financial support, employment assistance), social (housing, transportation, family support, parenting education, child care) and health (medical/mental health care for adult and child, relapse prevention, domestic/child/substance abuse issues). Permanent housing is established once families receive a Family Unification Voucher or Connecticut's Rental Assistance Program (RAP) Certificate. Families are eligible for housing services for up to two years, even when Child Welfare intervention is no longer required thus ensuring housing stability. The SHF program can serve up to 500 families annually, but only if permanent housing vouchers are made available. The SHF program's success rate is 80%.³

Additionally, DCF proposes to utilize housing vouchers obtained under this NOFA for young adults leaving foster care. DCF has seen a steady increase in youths leaving foster care who experience homelessness. Within one year DCF will receive approximately 100 young adults (average of 8-12 per month) seeking to re-enter the Foster Care system. Sixty (60%) to Seventy (70%) percent of these young adults are seeking assistance from DCF due to their biological families'

² Out of Reach 2006, National Low Income Housing Coalition


³ Connections, Inc 2008 Annual Report

inability or desire to provide them with adequate and safe housing.¹ Therefore, these young adults face homelessness unless housing supports are made available.

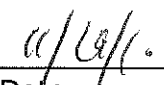
With our partnership with the town of West Hartford Housing Authority, we will be able to use awarded vouchers to serve 25 FUP families and FUP eligible youths in West Hartford. Currently there is estimated to be over one hundred and twenty-five (125) families awaiting supportive housing services in West Hartford. These families are currently homeless or at risk of homeless. This number is based on the Supportive Housing for Families (SHF) waitlist as of April 30, 2009 and the average of 100 referrals to the SHF statewide program received a month statewide throughout SFY 2009². The waitlist was closed in April 2009 due to the lack permanent housing vouchers.

The Department of Children and Families and the town of West Hartford are seeking federal assistance to execute our Memorandum of Understanding to allow our agencies to prevent and/or alleviate homelessness for families, children, and young adults. The need for these housing vouchers is especially critical in this economic climate. The need will continue to grow as deficits rise and budgets are cut. Connecticut is one of the few if not the only state with a proven and successful child welfare program that incorporates intensive case management services with a permanent housing voucher for families. DCF has utilized each and every housing voucher received since the Supportive Housing for Families Program began over 11 years ago. Federal Unification Vouchers are a critical resource to meeting the needs of Connecticut's DCF families and young adults aging out of foster care. Currently the state of Connecticut is unable to continue to provide state rental assistance vouchers for the program, which puts this nationally recognized program in jeopardy.

On behalf of DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES:



Susan I. Hamilton
Commissioner



Date

¹ DCF Re-entry Policy 42-20-50

² Connection Inc. In-take Unit